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# Einladung zum Vortrag

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## One Poet – Many Rāmāyaṇas

## Tulsīdās's Tellings of Rāmkaṭhā

The role of the Rāmcaritmānas (1574) – the magnum opus of Tulsīdās and the most famous of Hindi tellings of the Rāmāyaṇa – in the history of Hindi literature as well as in the ethos of north Indian culture is well known and cannot be overestimated. However, there are certain aspects of the poem's composition, e.g. the structure of its narrative realized through the series of four dialogues, that still require more extensive study. This problem takes on a new dimension in view of the fact that Tulsīdās, the author of several other works devoted to his chosen God Rām (e.g. the Rāmlalānahachū, the Rāmājñāpraśna, the Jānakīmaṅgal, the Gītāvalī, the Vinaypatrikā, the Barvai Rāmāyaṇ, the Kavītāvalī) narrates the story of Rām's life and deeds (Rāmkaṭhā) in different ways, changing, omitting or adding certain episodes. These seeming inconsistencies in Tulsīdās's works, which are typical of the entire Rāmāyaṇa (and not only) tradition, more than once puzzle and alarm Western scholars who feel an urge to establish „the right“ version of a given episode.

Such features of Tulsīdās's oeuvre in a natural way should draw our attention to (Great/Grand) Literacy Theory, whose foundations were laid by the so called Toronto School of Communication, i.e. Harold Innis (e.g. 1951), Marshall McLuhan (1962), Eric Havelock (e.g. 1963), as well as Jack Goody (1968, 1977, 1987) and Walter J. Ong (with his most widely known work *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* [1982]), to name the most important of its proponents. This significant theoretical position yielded an enormous body of works – from a critical stance as well – of more theoretical or practical character, also concerned with the traditions of particular cultures. As observed by C.J. Fuller (2001), India provides striking evidence for the debate on orality, literacy and memorization, and is also an outstanding example of a literate culture with a high oral residue.